DOCUMENT RESUME

..

ED 433 876 JC 990 590

AUTHOR	Robinson, Shawn
TITLE	Underprepared Students.
PUB DATE	1996-03-22
NOTE	8p.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Educational Counseling; Educationally Disadvantaged; *High Risk Students; Nontraditional Students; Role of Education; *Special Needs Students; *Student Characteristics; Student Evaluation; Student Needs; *Student Placement

ABSTRACT

This paper describes three main types of underprepared students: academically underprepared, emotionally underprepared, and culturally underprepared. The category that most faculty, counselors, and administrators tend to focus on is the academically underprepared. Remedial and student skills courses, free peer tutoring, and tutorials on videotapes and the computer are common ways to address the needs of these students. The emotionally underprepared student tends to have a lack of confidence in their skills, low self-esteem, personal problems outside of school, and possibly substance abuse problems. Since most instructors are not trained in counseling, many students whose only contact with the college is the instructor, must fend for themselves. The culturally underprepared students are often clueless as to what it takes to be successful in college and are first generation college students. These students are often assisted with extended orientations, support groups, or peer mentoring with a successful student. The lack of structure as one progresses through higher education leaves many students culturally and academically underprepared, and early assessment upon admission and intervention beginning before registration will help to get underprepared prepared students prepared for success in college. Reasons are offered for the underpreparedness problem and ways to generate help for unprepared students are suggested. (VWC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 433 876

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Robinson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

by Shawn Robinson

for Dr. Thomas Kubala

March 22, 1996

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE UNDERPREPARED STUDENT

To better understand, evaluate, and assist underprepared students, we must first know what it means to be underprepared. Underprepared students are often considered "at-risk" of not completing previously stated programs of study. Students may be underprepared all of their lives or only just recently. According to Pobywajlo, there are three main types of underprepared students: academically underprepared, emotionally underprepared, and culturally underprepared.

The category that most faculty, counselors, and administrators tend to focus on is the academically underprepared. It is usually easy to find out if the student isn't ready for college-level mathematics or English. If a student has a low high school grade point average, chose "easy" classes in high school, dropped out of high school, or has an untreated learning disability, then that student is academically underprepared (Pobywajlo). Most programs at post-secondary institutions focus on this type of student. Remedial and student skills courses, free peer-tutoring, and tutorials on videotape and the computer are common ways to address the needs of these students.

IC990590

The emotionally underprepared student tends to have a lack of confidence in their skills, low self-esteem, personal problems outside of school, and possibly substance abuse problems

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

(Pobywajlo). These students tend to need more assistance from counselors, peer advisors, and mentors, than from classroom instructors, tutors, or labs. These students need to have intentional, intrusive, and programmatic contact with a variety of college staff persons throughout the freshman year. (Carroll) These students should be "babied" (Stewart McCrae) and walked through experimentation with some strategies to become successful in non-threatening ways during the early academic terms. Often, personal counselors could provide students who have troubled backgrounds and lives the support, encouragement, and assistance they need to overcome terrible odds against success. Since most instructors aren't trained in counseling, many students, whose only contact with the college is the instructor, must fend for themselves.

The third group of students are those that are culturally underprepared. These students come from a background that is different from that of college. The way people think in academia is different from the way people think in the student's native community. These students may come from a family where education is not valued highly or at all. These students are often clueless of what it takes to be successful in college and are first generation college students. In a study be Beckenstein, it was noticed that many underprepared students hoped that "just being in a new environment would lead them down the correct path." These students don't know the language of college and often learn it by accident or don't learn it at all. Even academically successful high school students may be culturally underprepared. If college work is not believed to be inherently more challenging, difficult, or different from high school work, then the student could be unsuccessful during the first year and never return. These students are often assisted with extended orientations, support groups, or peer mentoring with a successful student. Students that

are fully "integrated into the college's academic and social system..." are more likely to complete college than isolated students. (Carroll)

In the community college setting, most students fit one of the three categories. This might help to explain why so few of our students reach their goals, eg. graduate. Many of the students that are underprepared don't know that they are underprepared, until it is almost too late. Something as simple as being more responsible for one's own learning through less structured learning experiences and more independent research and discovery may cause certain students to be unsuccessful. The lack of structure as one progresses through higher education leaves many students culturally and academically underprepared (Beckenstein). Early assessment upon admission and intervention beginning before registration will help to get the underprepared prepared for success in college.

SOME REASONS FOR THE UNDERPREPAREDNESS PROBLEM

In Florida, over 60% of community college students are academically underprepared. The number includes recent high school graduate and returning adult students. According to the U.S. Department of Education (McCabe), Florida has continually had one of the highest high school dropout rates in the 1990s. These dropouts, in a service-oriented state, are "virtually unemployable" in jobs earning more than minimum wage. Many of these students found little reason to stay in school due to a lack of connection to the educational system. Also, it is noted that the system is seen as "uncaring." McCabe cites a Commerce Department study that shows a correlation between education and salary. Many of these dropout students and high school graduates realize this correlation and turn to the community college or crime for increasing

lifetime wages. The desire to get out of low paying jobs and away from public assistance and become self-sufficient puts many Americans in a college setting as an underprepared student. These students from weak academic backgrounds can't get into universities, so they come to the community college. With funding increases for community colleges declining and Florida spending over ten times as much for a prisoner as for a student, the community college will not be able to effectively reach many needy students.

HELP FOR THE UNDERPREPARED STUDENT

Programs should be developed, sought after, refined, and implemented that "open the doors to capable but unprepared students" (Pobywajlo) in such a way that basic skills and student skills can be effectively improved. Early success for the underprepared student may assist that student in gaining confidence, knowledge, and the ability to persist in goal acquisition. Beckenstein states that "students who eventually graduate have academically good first semesters." It is therefore critical to give students the tools to become successful and to maintain that success as soon as possible. The use of counseling sessions and meetings has been highly successful when used by the students and institutions on a regular basis. The underprepared student who does not succeed tends to not take advantage of, or know about, the resources available, including counseling. Each "at-risk" student must be brought in for counseling and advising sessions that are helpful, informative, and both preventive and prescriptive. Informal interaction with teachers and other students help to give the students an attachment to the learning environment and feeling of importance. Being cared about by the institution is a critical factor in keeping culturally and emotionally underprepared students in school.

As was stated earlier, academic underpreparedness was usually easy to identity and treat. Project SYNERGY has looked at the ways to use technology to focus of this group of students. The project consisted of several colleges and universities in North America, thousands of students, and an IBM grant. Software packages such as PLATO and ISAAC were used to give students individualized attention in basic skills areas, instant feedback, and undivided attention. The software was reviewed and tested by multiple individuals and student progress was compared to standardized placement tests. The results tended to show significant improvements in poorly-skilled students. The use of computers was cited as critical to give the underprepared student a chance to catch up. Computer skills will be required in most fields and are possessed by many successful college students. If technology is to be integrated and made an effective part of helping the underprepared student, then it should not be merely "added on" but "assimilated and adopted" as part of the course structure.

CONCLUSION

For students to be effectively assisted, early warning systems must be in place that alert the appropriate college entity of a student's problems, whatever those problems may be. Students should not be allowed to be unsuccessful if they are committed to their own success. If the student is willing to work at achieving his or her goal, then the institution must provide many ways for success to take place (Carroll). It wouldn't hurt for college personnel to experience underpreparedness for the sake of better understanding of our students and developing strategies in a mindful and respectful manner.

The programs for the underprepared students must not be modeled on Henry Ford's "Give them any color they want, as long as it's black." Programs must be receptive to the individual needs of the student and "provide value added education." Those interested in student preparedness must continue to "explore every opportunity to provide the most cost effective means to give the student what the student requires" for success. (Swope)

Resources

Beckenstein, Lewis (1992)

Success Rate of Transfer Students Enrolled in a Program for the Underprepared at a Senior College. Journal of College Student Development; v33 n1 p56-60. EJ444088.

Carroll, Juollie (1988)

Freshman Retention and Attrition Factors at a Predominantly Black Urban Community College. Journal of College Student Development; v29 n1 p52-60. EJ370055.

McCabe, Robert H. (1995) Starving the Solution. ED383399.

McCrae, Stewart (1995)

Comments taken from a 1995 presentation to the Valencia Community College Title III Design Teams.

Pobywajlo, Margaret (1989)

The AFY Program at UNHM: Reaching Out to Underprepared Students. ED324673

Swope, Suzanne (1993)

THE APPROACHING VALUE ADDED EDUCATION. Suzanne Swope is Vice Provost for Academic Support at George Mason University. This article was found on the GMU internet site.

Various Contributors (1992)

Project SYNERGY: Software Support for Underprepared Students. Year Two Report. ED345804.